



Testimony, Public Safety and Security Committee, February 26, 2019

Good afternoon, Senator Kushner, Representative Porter, and members of the Labor Committee.

My name is Derek Puorro. I am a Middletown police sergeant and chairman of the Public Safety Committee of Council 4 AFSCME, a union of 32,000. We represent over 2,000 Connecticut municipal police officers.

We support Senate Bill 164 AN ACT INCLUDING CERTAIN MENTAL OR EMOTIONAL IMPAIRMENTS WITHIN THE DEFINITION OF "PERSONAL INJURY" UNDER THE WORKERS' COMPENSATION STATUTES.

This is a bill proposed by Senators Bob Duff and Cathy Osten that restores workers' compensation coverage for police officers and firefighters. CBS News reported a few weeks ago that during the last two years officer suicides outpaced officer "line of duty" deaths. However, Police Officers are not eligible to get workers compensation for post-traumatic stress disorder in Connecticut, even though 32 other states provide this. Officers have a much higher PTSD rate than other occupations.

Our union thanks Senators Duff and Osten, and several other legislators who have supported restoring such coverage. There are very few officer and firefighters who will ever use such coverage. But it is verifiable and agreed upon by the medical and scientific community, the US military, police officers and most governmental managers and policymakers that PTSD exists, and has real and harmful effects.

Yet coverage for mental impairment was taken away in 1993 in a sweeping downgrading of Connecticut's workers' compensation insurance. We have been asking for restoration of such coverage for 26 years. We seem fairly close to an agreement with the CT Conference on Municipalities on many principles around restoring PTSD workers' compensation for police officers and fire fighters.

It is important to encourage officers to seek needed treatment, as research has shown that officers are 1.5 times more likely to commit suicide than members of the general public (Badge of Life – a nonprofit foundation that seeks to prevent police suicides.) Officer life expectancy is 66 years-of-age compared to 76 for the general public.

We also request that you amend this bill to allow an officer who seeks mental health treatment to get their service weapon back more quickly than state statute now allows. An officer in Connecticut who receives in-patient mental health treatment is at risk for

losing their service weapon for 6 to 62 months. Though this probably occurred as an unintended consequence, it is a barrier to getting officers to seek treatment.